DISTRO**HOPPER**

Our pick of the latest releases will whet your appetite for new Linux distributions.
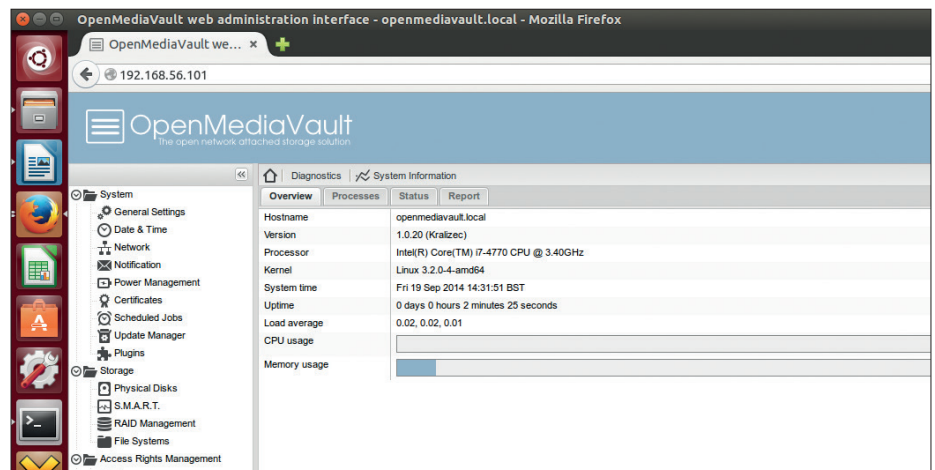
Open Media Vault

Keep your data backed up.

With Open Media Vault, you can set up a NAS without ever having to go near the command line.

Open Media Vault (OMV) is a Network Attached Storage (NAS) system built on open source software. Traditionally, this is an area that has been dominated by the BSD flavour of Unix, but there are now a few Linux NAS systems fighting back. It's straightforward to install OMV through its *Curses*-based installer. You just enter some basic details (username, password, and a few other bits and pieces), and the rest of the installation is automatic.

When you boot the machine following an install, it will go to a text-based Linux login that tells you the IP address to access the machine at. By default, you'll have web access to a control panel, and from here you can enable SSH, FTP, Rsync and other access protocols, as well as adding users and managing the system.

With GUI control panels, there's always a trade-off between how easy it is to use a system and how complicated the control panel is. OMV's control panel is easy to use, but you need to know what you want to set up, so it's not a completely trivial affair for non-technical people.

Advanced users may miss the power of ZFS configuration that's possible with some of the BSD and Solaris based NAS solutions. Technically, it is possible to add ZFS, but only through the command line rather than the web control panel. OMV is based on Debian Wheezy, so anything that's possible on that should be possible on OMV.

Open Media Vault should work well for most home or small office networks. It's most suited for people comfortable using Linux who don't want to make the switch to BSD for their NAS.

Q4OS

A distro that's keeping KDE 3 alive in a KDE 5 world.

Most KDE users are preparing themselves for the shift from version 4 to version 5. However, a few hardy souls still maintain that the desktop reached perfection in version 3, and still cling doggedly to it. The Trinity project forked KDE 3 after development stopped in 2008, and has continued releasing bugfixes.

Q4OS uses the Trinity desktop to provide what the developers claim is a "fast and powerful desktop operating system designed to offer classic-style user interface, long-term stability and strong foundation for complex third party applications."

There was nothing wrong with KDE 3 – indeed, it was a great desktop environment,

possibly the best desktop environment of its day. Here at Linux Voice, we have fond memories of it. We even clung to it for a while in the face of the early releases of KDE 4. However, times have moved on; fashions have moved on; the way we use computers has moved on; but Trinity hasn't moved on.

Q4OS is good for a nostalgia, but we struggle to think of a reason to recommend it beyond this. If you're looking for a *Qt*-based environment that's less resource hungry than KDE 4 (or 5), then Razor Qt or the upcoming LXQT would be a better option.

Some commentators have touted it as a potential refuge for Windows XP users not willing to go to Windows 8. The design is
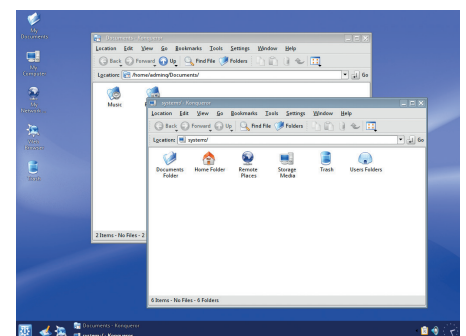
No, really, this image, resplendent in KDE 3, is of a distro released in 2014.

certainly inkeeping with the trends of the same era, but we're not convinced that this is reason enough to hold back the future.

There is a place for distros with slow change cycles that don't force new ways of working on unsuspecting users every year or two, but Q4OS takes it just a little too far.

Gentoo

Speed freaks and tinkerers only need apply.

Around 14 million years ago, the gentoo penguin split off from the chinstrap and became an independent species. In this time, it's adapted to become one of the fastest species of penguins and can swim three times as fast as the emperor penguin.

12 years ago, Gentoo became an independent Linux distribution built for speed. It gets this speed by providing packages as source code rather than binary packages. This source code can then be compiled and optimised for the specific machine it's installed on. This build-it-yourself philosophy goes beyond just compilation though, and makes Gentoo one of the most configurable systems available.

Of course, speed is a many-faced concept. While it may be quicker to run things on Gentoo, it's slower to install them (you can also install binary packages to save time if you wish). With each new, better, faster generation of hardware, the overhead of compilation gets smaller. Still, it's worth considering the processing power of your computer when deciding whether to use Gentoo Linux.

Compiling KDE from scratch gives you access to even more options than the already overloaded configuration files. There's a speed boost, but it's more about the customisation for Gentoo users.

While speed is often the reason Gentoo users give for using the distro, we suspect that this isn't really the case. Specifically compiled code is like tailor-made clothes, but instead of fitting your body perfectly, it fits your CPU exactly how it should. It just feels better in a way that's hard to describe.

The compilation opens up a whole set of options that many Linux users never knew they had. If you like to tinker – really tinker – with your system, then Gentoo might be for you. It may make your computer a little quicker, but let's be honest here, it's more about the joy of tinkering, isn't it?

Ubuntu Mate Can a new spin draw back some lost users?

Ubuntu Mate looks and feels nice – like an updated version of pre-Unity Ubuntu, just less brown and orange. This might be too little, too late though, as most Ubuntu users who don't like Unity have long since left to find other distros, such as Mint, which is based on Ubuntu and already comes with the Mate desktop.

There are a few differences between Mint Mate and Ubuntu Mate though. For example, Ubuntu Mate has the software centre and has simpler access to a lot of non-free software. Now that Mint's going to be based solely on LTS releases (with some back-ported features), Ubuntu Mate should have more up-to-date software. There isn't much difference now, as we're only a few months from the previous LTS release, but in a year's time, there will probably be a pronounced difference (of course, people who don't like chasing the latest releases may prefer the more sedate release pace of Mint Mate). On the other hand, the Mate desktop is developed by the Mint team, so Mate-specific software will probably start being released on a schedule to work best with Mint.

At the time of writing, Ubuntu Mate wasn't an official spin, and it's not clear if it ever will be. This shouldn't overly trouble users, but it might mean there's a slight delay between when a new version of Ubuntu is officially released and the new version of Ubuntu Mate is coming out. It's too soon to tell how long this delay will be though.

As we've come to expect from prominent Ubuntu spins (even non-official ones like Mate), it's well themed and looks good out of the box. The development team haven't tried to recreate the look of older versions of Ubuntu; instead, they've tried to create a new look that is modern yet still has a familiar feel to it.
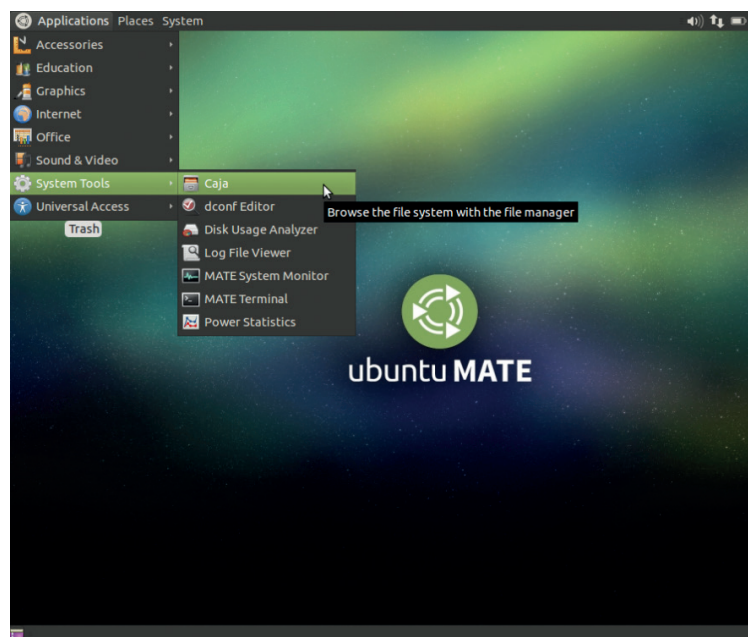
Ubuntu Mate is the most anticipated Ubuntu release of the year, despite the fact that it hasn't come from Canonical, Ubuntu's parent company.